

We suggest that we advise great caution about people practising exorcism, for a number of reasons.

1. Psychological / Mental health reasons.

(a) The suggestion that a person is demon possessed has for many, exacerbated their problems, causing people who have sincerely tried to follow Christ to feel that they have failed as Christians or that their Christian life is worthless. Guilt is often added to their suffering and also a sense of alienation from God or rejection by God.

(b) Exorcism, often, if not most times, involves psychological violence. Scott Peck admits that it is very close to or is even a form of brainwashing. While the persons practising exorcism may see this as directed at the demon or evil spirit, the question of preventing this from doing emotional violence to the person is a moot point.

(c) The suggestion that a person is demon possessed can have unhealthy consequences in encouraging failure to accept responsibility for their actions in that they opt out of responsibility, passing it to the demon.

2. Concern about the actual incidence of demon possession.

While the biblical world view clearly included belief in possession by demons or evil spirits, we would maintain that to-day there are neurological, psychiatric and psychological explanations for many of the disturbances that were then, and are to-day, classified, by some, as demon possession.

Scott Peck maintains that in 95% of the cases, there are such explanations. We would question whether the other 5% are in fact, possession. Mental health workers with extensive experience, claim that they have not come across any cases that they would consider demon "possession":

(a) Some people who had been considered by others to be demon possessed, were suffering from epilepsy or schizophrenia. In these cases, medication helps to control the condition and early treatment is important.

(b) Some people experienced the condition known as *ukuthwasa*.

(c) We need to distinguish between a person being possessed by evil and the person being possessed by a demon or evil spirit. When a person repeatedly gives in to evil, a feedback or circular re-inforcing dynamic may be established which in

the end seems like possession.

We suggest that there are alternative explanations for some of the "symptoms" that are considered indications of possession. Change of voice or uncharacteristic behaviour can be explained by the phenomenon of multiple personalities. Change of voice, trance like states and blackouts or amnesia as in the phenomenon of izizwe are interesting examples. Izizwe literally means Nations or Tribes. This seems to link with the Gedarene demoniac and the multiple personalities. The phenomenon of izizwe has connotations with witchcraft, which we would have difficulty in accepting.

The phenomenon of imbongi or praise singers, where there is a change of voice. Here the term used is also that for being possessed, yet we would not suggest that they are possessed by a demon or evil spirit.

One explanation is that this is caused by an intense emotional state. Altered states of consciousness can be brought on by self hypnosis. Another phenomenon is that of people who in response to preaching, will break winds, groan and change their voice. Again it does not seem that we have to suggest that they are possessed. Intense emotions and cultural factors are significant.

The phenomenon of psychological fugue seems relevant to memory blanks and also changes in behaviour. Stress plays a part here.

Theological Concerns.

1. It was suggested that the devil's power, in line with the biblical view that he is the tempter or deceiver, is limited to tempting us, by deceiving us into doing the wrong thing. In this way he may get power over us, but it is because we give him that power. He does not have the power to pounce on us and possess us. One member of the commission would not see the devil's power as limited to this.

2. We can note also that "principalities" and powers" in Paul's writings do not necessarily refer to personal beings. There are a number of suggestions that he uses these terms to refer to political powers and to laws and regulations, structures, philosophies or public opinion. (E.g., Colossians 2 : 8 - 23). Hendrikus Berkhof Christ and the Powers. Herald Press 1977. The New International Version translates stoicheia as basic principles of the World in Gal 4 : 3 and Paul seems here to use it to refer to the law. It is possible that Paul is using figurative personifications as he does with sin and death.

Guidelines for dealing with someone who is considered to be demon possessed.

This will depend on whether the person him/herself believes they are possessed. We need to gain an understanding of why they believe it and what it means to them.

It is suggested that people be given teaching and counselling re belief in demon possession. The point made under theological concerns is relevant here and also the point that the devil and / or evil spirits' power is subject to God and is, therefore, limited. He therefore is not able to exert influence over us against which God cannot protect us if we turn to Him.

We suggest that counselling needs to include helping the person, with God's help, to accept responsibility for his / her behaviour and life.

Before it is decided that a person is possessed, and exorcism attempted or suggested, psychological / psychiatric assessment needs to be obtained from a Psychiatrist or Clinical Psychologist and the Bishop must be consulted.

The psycholological / mental health dangers mentioned above need to be borne in mind.

Trevour Van Zyl De Bruyn.

